Clarify Probe Role, Ford Told

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The chairman of the House banking committee said yesterday that President Ford should make a prompt, public explanation of conflicting accounts about Ford's role in blocking a 1972 congressional investigation of the laundering of money in the Watergate scandal.

Rep. Henry S. Reuss (D-Wis.) said in a statement from Milwaukee that Watergate Special Prosecutor Charles Ruff should also conduct a special inquiry into the squelching of the 1972 investigation by Reuss' committee, which then was headed by Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.), who died last year.

The retrospective controversy warmed up again in light of remarks by former White House counsel John W. Dean III yesterday morning on NBC-TV's "Today" show.

Dean named Richard Cook, former chief lobbyist for the Nixon White House in the House of Representatives, as "the man who did the legwork" and dealt with then House Minority Leader Ford, among others, about blocking the Patman investigation.

During confirmation hearings on his nomination to become Vice President, Ford acknowledged meeting with Republican members of the banking committee about the inquiry, but he said he did so on his own initiative and denied he was

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contacted in the effort by the White House staff.

However, Dean, when asked to check his records as White House counsel regarding his contacts with Cook, said they showed about 15 contacts with Cook between Sept. 6 and Oct. 12, 1972. In more than half a dozen of these conversations, Dean told NBC, Cook reported on meetings with Ford about the Watergate problem.

The House committee blocked the proposed investigation on Oct. 3, 1972, by a vote of 20 to 15, with all 14 Republicans on the committee voting against the investigation and joined by six Democrats.

Now a lobbyist for Lockheed, Cook accused Dean of "cheap huckstering" for his just-published Watergate book. Cook said that "despite John Dean's repeated and frantic requests, I never spoke with Mr. Ford about the need to deny Mr. Patman's request for subpoena power."

Cook said he met with Dean on the issue "because Dean was frantic" that the hearings might be held. But Cook added pessimistically:

"Don't tell me that anyone [disputing] Dean can come out other than second best. John Dean titillates the whole world. He could nail anyone . . ."

White House press secretary Ron Nessen was quoted as saying that Ford would stand by his congressional testimony and would have nothing to add.

Two other House Democrats, Elizabeth Holtzman (N.Y.) and John Conyers Jr. (Mich.), joined in calling on prosecutor Ruff to determine whether Ford told the truth during his 1973 vice presidential confirmation hearings.

The Patman committee staff had been trying to determine where the money used to pay the Watergate burglars had come from, but the investigation was stymied when 14 Republicans and 6 Democrats voted against granting the subpoena power necessary to keep the investigation going forward.